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## ABSTRACT

This guide provides standards for school principals and other administrators exploring school-age child care programs, reviews child care research and effective practices that have emerged over the past two decades, and describes characteristics of effective programs. An introduction describes the growing need for day care services; defines school-age day care; and provides four steps to begin planning a program, including building a partnership with community organizations, assessing the local supply and need, using the assessment to design the program, and gaining approval for start-up. The next section describes the role of the school with respect to school-based programs, the use of outdoor and indoor space, and community-based programs. Human relationships are discussed in the third section, including the relationships between program staff and children, individual staff members, staff and parents, and the program and the school. Program activities and scheduling are the focus of the fourth section. The final section reviews program administration, highlighting requirements for personnel; provisions for the safety, health, and nutrition of children; fiscal management; and issues related to authorization, licensing, and liability. For each program area discussed, standards for excellence and quality indicators are provided to establish a checklist for program implementation. This checklist and 23 references are appended. (BCY)

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*STANDARDS FOR*

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# Quality School-Age Child Care

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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# Foreword

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The patterns of family life have changed dramatically over the past two decades. More and more parents have entered the work force, resulting in increasing numbers of children who are unsupervised for three or more hours a day. In response, elementary and middle school principals have joined in community efforts to explore, for children ages 5-13, alternatives to taking care of themselves during these hours.

Principals, superintendents and boards of education have formed partnerships with parents, public officials, youth and civic organizations to develop programs that provide safe, nurturing places for children's out-of-school hours. Such programs support children's growth and development, and their ability to do well in school.

*Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care* has been developed for principals and their partners to:

- Discuss what types of programs best meet the needs of children, parents and communities;
- Examine the latest research and best practices in school-age child care that have emerged over the past two decades; and
- Outline the elements of high quality programs and establish a quality checklist to guide programs through start-up and improvement.

These standards set forth the ideal; few programs will meet all the criteria. Most programs will be able to develop many new goals for improvement by using these *Standards* to review program strength. This publication has been prepared by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the School-Age Child Care Project at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. It is part of a project to provide training and information to principals interested in school-age child care.

This is the fourth publication of its kind developed by NAESP with a committee of principals, who have worked together to share their experiences and knowledge of school-age child care. Special thanks also go to author Susan O'Connor, of the Wellesley SACCProject, to Louanne Wheeler of NAESP, who edited the document, and to NAESP's Ron Areglado, Merrie Hahn and June Million, for their many contributions. Support for development, publication, and dissemination of this publication was provided by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Primerica Foundation, and an anonymous foundation. NAESP and the School-Age Child Care Project are grateful for their support.

We wish for each school and principal, rewarding involvement with school-age child care.



Samuel G. Sava, Executive Director, NAESP



6 John Fero, President, NAESP

# Introduction

## Why Are Principals Getting Involved in School-Age Child Care?

There was a time when elementary and middle school principals saw children off at the end of the school day, knowing that most would be met at home by their mothers. After a snack, they might join other children to play outdoors, relax indoors with books or games, or get a start on homework.

Over the last 20 years, principals have seen that scenario disappear. Today, more than three in four school-age children live in families where both parents work, or in single-parent families. As a result, whole neighborhoods are empty of adults throughout the work day.

Principals have become increasingly concerned as children arrive at school too early in the morning, linger after school, or walk to empty homes or apartments, sometimes through dangerous neighborhoods. While some research suggests that children left alone may become more resourceful and independent, other research indicates that the premature responsibilities of taking care of themselves may be too much for some children.

For some children, taking care of themselves may mean:

- Walking home through an unsafe neighborhood.
- Too much time indoors and alone, watching TV, feeling bored and lonely.
- Risks of accidents at home and outdoors.
- Fears about being alone.
- Responsibility of caring for younger siblings.
- Experimentation with drugs, alcohol and sex.
- Fewer opportunities to develop new interests and skills.
- Fewer activities in which to experience success.

As educators, our concern for children does not start and end with the school bell. We know that children's ability to learn is affected by what happens outside school. A 1987 Harris opinion poll asked teachers to rank seven possible causes of students having difficulty. "Children left on their own after school" was listed by 51 percent as the number one factor. Recent research indicates that children's participation in quality after-school programs results in enhanced self-esteem and social and academic competence (Posner and Vandell 1991). The time spent by a child outside school and away from parents may be greater than the time spent at school. These hours are too many and too precious to waste.

Principals know children in their communities need school-age child care. In a 1988 NAESP survey, 84 percent of 1,175 responding principals said children in their communities need supervision before and after school, and two-thirds felt that public schools should provide that care. Increasingly, principals are involved in developing programs that provide a safe and caring place for children during out-of-school hours. This publication is designed to help them implement the best of such programs.

**S**chool-age child care gives children a safe and secure place to be when school is not in session. Here they can learn, relax, have fun and thrive with other children and adults.

A program may be open before school, after school, or all day during school holidays, vacations, snow days and teacher inservice days. Some programs offer a summer day camp experience. The standards set out here are designed primarily for before- and after-school programs, and only secondarily apply to the activities and pace of a full day or summer camp experience.

Programs are usually designed to serve elementary and middle school children, ages 5-13, but are increasingly open to preschoolers who may attend part-day programs within the school and need "wrap-around" care. Programs for children beyond age 14 are also increasing, since few alternatives exist for this age group.

A high quality program will have:

- Warm and respectful staff who guide children in important ways.
- Staff who work well with each other, parents and the community.
- Cozy and well organized indoor space, with a variety of interest areas.
- Outdoor space offering plenty of safe and challenging activities.
- Provision for the safety, health and nutrition of the children.
- Activities that reflect the broad range of children's developmental stages and interests.
- A flexible and relaxed schedule.

A good program is not simply a longer school day. It is different in both structure and content. Children who have been in school for six hours need to shift gears, much as adults do after work. The focus shifts from academics and achievement to recreation and socialization. Set schedules becomes flexible, with children moving at their own pace. The space is warm, both physically and emotionally, with soft spaces and inviting activity areas:



The best school-age child care programs are collaborative community efforts where everyone with a stake in children's development works together. Each school and community is different, and the level of school involvement will vary from place to place. Some schools may not feel able to go beyond their primary task of education, but being involved with child care does not require schools to become providers. However, programs will always be stronger if the school supports them and is a player in the process. A basic plan for getting started will include these steps:

## 1. Building a partnership

An effort to develop school-age child care may begin with a casual conversation between two people concerned about children. A parent might speak with a principal, or a public official with the school superintendent. A group of parents might compare notes about their patchwork child care arrangements. Such initial discussions are most likely to bear fruit if the initiators identify all others potentially concerned, and then launch dialogues about possible solutions.

Principals may be the first to speak. It is wise to talk to people who know what arrangements already exist for school-age children in the community, and what barriers stand in the way of giving children a safe and worthwhile place to be during out-of-school hours. As a principal, you may have the information, but if not, talk with people and agencies who do. They may be interested in joining the effort. Check with child care resource and referral agencies, child advocacy organizations, child care centers, organizations that serve youth (such as YMCA, YWCA, Scouts, or Campfire) and funding organizations like the United Way.

Representatives from such groups might form the beginnings of a task force. Broaden the base of your coalition to include the people who have the most to gain—parents. Add other people and organizations who care about children: religious groups, civic organizations (League of Women Voters, Lions Club) and other school personnel (guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, boards of education, PTAs). Involve people with skills to contribute, such as child care professionals, lawyers and accountants. Don't forget to include the people who make decisions or have financial resources, such as local and state officials, licensing agencies, boards of education and the business community.

The broader your base of power and support, the easier will be the start-up task. You will need the support of these people in the months and years to come. Get them involved and keep them involved.

Once a partnership has begun, observe the basic rules for successful task groups:

- **Establish strong leadership.** Find someone who is committed to school-age child care, has good group skills (such as knowing how to run meetings) and can delegate responsibility.

- **Develop clear goals.** Decide together what vision you share for children's out-of-school hours. People will stay with you if you set clear goals and make obvious progress toward them.
- **Develop an action plan.** Involve each person in the effort, using their skills and resources. People will stay involved when they feel their contributions are valued and make a difference.

## 2. Assessing the need and existing supply

The best program is one designed to respond to the unique needs and resources of your community. The first step is to assess that need. What services already exist? How many children need a program? What type of program do children and their families need? The existing providers appreciate it when a school takes steps to learn if there is a need for additional care before proceeding with plans. Schools that have neglected this step have been severely criticized.

Few coalitions have all this information at their fingertips, and it's often necessary to conduct a formal assessment of needs. Schools can distribute a questionnaire for children to take home, with a stamped and addressed return envelope. A survey table might be set up at a school function that most parents attend. One school provided phones and phone lists for a telephone survey.

Some questions to include in any type of assessment are:

- How many children need care?
- How many will need care in the future? (Check projected school population.)
- What are their ages?
- When is care needed?
  - before school? (hours?)
  - after school? (hours?)
  - school vacations?
  - holidays?
  - snow days?
  - teacher inservice days?
  - summer?
- What arrangement does the family currently use? Is it adequate?
- Would the family use the program?
- What location is best?
- What is affordable?
- Would the family need financial assistance?
- What types of activities would the child enjoy?
- Would the family participate in planning?

### Designing the program

Once you have conducted the initial assessment, you can use the results to help answer three crucial questions: *Who* needs the program? *What* kind of a program will answer their needs? *Where* should it be based? Asking these questions each time your group makes a program design decision will keep the focus where it should be—on the children. Whether making choices about location, space, staffing or fees, keep in mind the needs of your target population.

To begin the design process, ask these questions about the children:

- Where do they go to school?
- What is their access to transportation?
- What about children with special needs? Financial needs?

Once it is clear who you will serve, you can make other decisions, like who will run the program. There are many choices, each with advantages and disadvantages.

People often look to the schools first—both to run and to house the program. After all, schools have a vested interest in the children, transportation problems would be eliminated, and the school has valuable in-kind resources. But a school has so many mandates that it is often not realistic to take on another. There are also agencies which have become expert at running programs and have already ironed out the kinks.

At this planning stage, there are two questions to ask:

*Who* is best to administer the program? Is the school or a community-based agency better prepared to do the job? Youth-serving agencies, child care centers or community agencies may be happy to join in a partnership with the school.

*Where* should the program be located? Is the best possible space in the school or somewhere else in the community?

Community-run programs have many advantages. A group with an established track record in school-age child care brings expertise in dealing with the complicated and time-consuming details of running a program. The group might also be able to lean on a broader budget for start-up and operational costs for the first year or two until enrollment increases. It may have an established relationship with funders. It can draw experienced staff from existing programs to run the new program.

There are also advantages to school-sponsored programs. The program can become part of the established legal entity of the school, so incorporation and new liability insurance arrangements are not necessary. Schools sponsoring programs may be quicker to lend in-kind and direct support to the program, and feel a greater sense of ownership and pride in it.

If the school “donates” the space, it can take a load off the program’s budget. Schools are already set up for children, but how will that impact accessibility, comfort

and activity choices? Will school personnel welcome the program? How appropriate is the space? Can program staff offer a lot of activity choices, or are they limited by the location? Will program staff find it difficult to make adjustments to cope with the school's procedures and use of the space? Is shared space in a school better than designated space in a community center six blocks away?

#### 4.

#### Gaining approval for start-up

During the planning stage, it is important to begin working toward approval for program start-up. As it becomes clear who may run the program and where it might be located, involve the appropriate people within those organizations in the planning process. Include their representatives in your planning meetings. Get an informal agreement that the organization is interested in becoming involved. When the program plan is firm, approach the organization to gain formal approval. A written agreement might be in the form of a letter of understanding, a contract, or a lease.

It is also important to check on local and state licensing regulations, and how to meet local building, fire, safety and health codes, and zoning regulations. Most states have licensing regulations for child care facilities. Find out which cover the planned program. Sometimes school-based or school-run programs are exempt from licensing, but may fall under the aegis of the state's department of education.

Also examine insurance costs and other legal issues, such as tax-exempt status and incorporating as a nonprofit organization. Listed at the back of this book are additional resources on fund-raising, budgets, marketing, licensing and staffing.

Whether the program is school-based or community-based, the school has a role to play in the start-up and implementation of school-age child care programs.

# The Role of the School

## School-based Programs

The school plays a pivotal role in the quality of school-based programs when it provides:

- a warm welcome to the program;
- ongoing communication and support;
- adequate indoor and outdoor space and storage;
- a commitment to high standards.

About one-third of all school-age child care programs in the United States are based in schools, according to data from the *National Study of Before & After School Programs* (U.S. Department of Education 1993). About half of all school-based programs are sponsored by the host school; the other half are usually sponsored by community organizations. So schools are in a unique position to support and enhance quality in these programs.

Hosting a program in your school can be like having a guest in your home, especially if you invite an outside vendor to provide the service. The relationship will work best if the "guest" feels welcomed by a supportive principal and staff, has pleasant space and storage, and both the host and program communicate frequently.

***Standard of Excellence: The school will formalize its relationship with the program to ensure sound communication and clarify policies, roles and responsibilities to benefit the children served.***

There is no guarantee that school-based programs, whether school-sponsored or not, will be readily accepted by the school family. As with all relationships, communication is the key. The program is more likely to be accepted when you involve the personnel it impacts the most. Don't forget the custodian who will clean the program space, the secretary who will answer phone calls, or the teacher who will share a classroom.

### Quality Indicators

- School staff help the program staff, children and parents feel they're an important part of the school family by greeting them warmly, accommodating reasonable requests, and taking concerns or problems through proper channels.
- The school and program agree in writing on rules, roles and responsibilities regarding space, maintenance schedules, finances and accountability.
- School and program personnel affected by the agreement are asked for input before it is made final, to ensure that they can both accept and comply with the agreement.
- At least once a year, the agreement and its guidelines are reviewed to assess their impact on both program and school.
- The school and program each designate liaisons who meet periodically to review administrative issues and share pertinent information about the children and the program.

***Standard of Excellence: School communities explore how their policies can best support a high quality program for all children.***

School-age child care programs are constantly forced to find a balance among quality, affordability and adequate staff compensation. Program budgets are primarily supported by parent fees, which frequently puts care out of the reach of low-income families. Many programs are forced to balance their budget by paying low salaries and no benefits to staff. And most programs are limited by tight budgets which adversely impact staff-child ratios, supplies and materials, activity choices, and nutrition.

This situation does not work for most families. A 1989 survey of 5,000 Boston public and parochial school parents showed that two-thirds were not satisfied with their current arrangements.\*

Schools can make a critical difference in balancing accessibility, affordability and quality. The in-kind and direct support that schools offer, such as donated space, utilities, maintenance or direct contributions, can make a world of difference. These contributions may make it possible for programs to pay higher salaries, retain experienced staff, and provide financial assistance for low-income families.

Schools have the opportunity to make sure the program meets quality standards. Having an agreement with a contracting agency that spells out all facets of the relationship, schools can require that certain standards are met and that assessment and evaluation are undertaken. School personnel may offer to participate in the assessment or evaluation process.

In schools, accessibility for children with special needs is required by legislation. The child care field is now required to make "reasonable accommodations" to serve children with disabilities under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Programs housed in school space may find it easier to accept more children with disabilities while making fewer costly adjustments.

**Quality Indicators**

- Schools provide maximum possible support to the program budget through in-kind and direct contributions, including no- or low-cost charges for space, utilities, maintenance, administration, and contributions of cash, materials and equipment.
- Schools work with the program to identify sources to contribute to sliding fee scales, subsidies and scholarships, so all families can afford to use the program.
- Schools work with the program so children with special needs can participate.
- Schools use their resources and influence to ensure the program is of high quality.

\*(Challenges Facing Boston Families: The Need for School-Age Child Care, Parents United for Child Care and the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1989.)

## Indoor and Outdoor Space

***Standard of Excellence: Indoor space is comfortable, adequate in size, clean and well organized.***

An estimated 20 to 30 percent of school-based programs are housed in space designated solely for the program's use. This arrangement is preferable for most programs because they can personalize the space to suit their needs, display children's work, and have room for "work-in-progress."

However, the majority of programs use shared space in a cafeteria, gymnasium or classroom. Unfortunately, this can mean that staff and children face constant constraints in what they can do, and when. Are children trying to play a quiet board game or do homework while other children play basketball? Do children spend an additional three to five hours in a classroom, sitting at desks, asking staff for access to the one storage cabinet of books, games and toys? Is there so little storage that staff keep supplies and equipment in canvas bags or stored in their cars?

For shared space to work, program staff need to be innovative and school staff supportive and receptive to ideas. With creativity, shared space can be transformed each day in minutes using modular furniture, moveable storage units and room dividers, large pillows, bean bag chairs, and carpet squares.

Whether dedicated or shared, space needs to be the right size. Children may wander aimlessly in too large an area, or become aggressive in cramped quarters. Space with lots of cozy and inviting interest areas encourages children's exploration and involvement. It is an art to craft a well designed space that takes into account the program's philosophy, available space, and the way in which room arrangements will affect the children's activities and interactions.

### Quality Indicators

- Indoor space is adequate, with at least 35 square feet per child.
- The area is safe, clean, and in good repair.
- The space is separated for different types of activities:
  - quiet areas for rest, privacy, reading or homework;
  - interest areas for board games, creative arts, dramatic play, cooking and eating, science and nature, blocks and building materials;
  - open areas for large motor activity or to gather in groups.
- The area is cozy, warm and inviting, using carpets, couches, pillows and bean bag chairs to create soft spaces.
- Storage is adequate to keep the space neat and well organized.
- The space is organized so that children moving from one space to another don't disrupt ongoing activities.
- Supplies and materials are accessible to children.

- Children have a place to store their personal belongings and ongoing projects.
- Moveable storage cabinets and stacked containers aid in shared space situations.
- Children's projects are prominently displayed.
- Water is available for drinking, art and science projects, cooking and cleanup.
- Children's special needs are taken into account (e.g., wheelchair ramps and handicapped-accessible toilets).
- Ventilation and temperature are comfortable.
- Noise level is acceptable for the activity taking place in any given area.

***Standard of Excellence: Outdoor space is adequate in size and has enough equipment and activity choices to offer a variety of safe challenges for children.***

One clear advantage of school-based programs is often appropriate outdoor play space. This is a critical resource when working with school-age children who need room to "blow off steam," run, jump and make noise. If existing outdoor space is not accessible or safe, staff should seek other play areas. Choices for outdoor activities are as important as for indoor activities. If space is not available daily (increasingly the case, particularly in urban settings), the program should explore transportation to available and safe surroundings.

#### **Quality Indicators**

- Outdoor space is adequate, with at least 75 square feet per child.
- The space is clean, safe, and protected from traffic, unwanted visitors and environmental hazards.
- Separate areas exist for:
  - active games, sports and running;
  - quiet play;
  - climbing and swinging;
  - extra choices, which might include gardening, fort building, winter activities and other self-initiated activities.
- There is enough equipment that children don't need to crowd or argue over it.
- The equipment is age-appropriate to offer safe challenges for the children.
- The area and equipment are adapted to children with special needs (for example, pull tunnels for children who can't use their legs, sandboxes high enough for children in wheelchairs, rigid swing seats and straps to hold children who need support).



## Community-based Programs

*Standard of Excellence: Schools support families' free choice of care arrangements by making it possible for children to get to care safely, and by setting up communication with community-based programs to share important information about children.*

Schools play an important role in supporting families' ability to choose the non-school care arrangement they prefer. Even if there is a school-based program in your community, there will be families who choose not to use it. Some children do better in a smaller, home-like family day care setting. Some families may prefer to stay in a long-standing arrangement with a child care center. An older child may prefer a program at a youth club.

Getting children to programs presents a challenge for parents. Examine transportation policies to see if they support family choice. Although this is a big task, it helps to prevent latchkey situations or burdening parents with transportation costs. Many schools allow parents to designate pickup and drop-off points other than the child's home. Most transportation policies require that the drop-off will be only at licensed family day-care homes or centers. Some schools work out arrangements for program staff to meet children at school to walk or drive them to the program. Other schools rent school buses to programs, especially during school and summer vacations, so children can go on excursions and field trips.

### Quality Indicators

- Schools support a broad range of care options for families, and when possible, make information available to organizations that can help parents find suitable care.
- Schools are aware of the major care providers in their community and reach out to them to establish communication about children. The school can explore the program's need for support, such as access to guidance personnel and space for special events like plays, or for everyday use of gyms or playgrounds.
- Schools review the impact that current transportation policies have on families' ability to connect with care arrangements.
- Schools take all feasible steps to provide safe and free or low-cost transportation for before-school and after-school care. They maintain high standards in vehicle and driver safety and in selecting safe sites for drop-off and pickup.
- Schools work cooperatively with programs that provide their own transportation to make sure drop-off and pickup run smoothly and safely.

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## Staff-Child Relationships

**P**ositive staff interactions with children, parents and each other make the critical difference between mediocre and high-quality programs.

If sound administration is the foundation and framework of a great program, human relationships are its heart and soul. Programs with staff who are warm, supportive and thoughtful with children, parents and each other can be sure they are on the right track. When staff and parents work as partners, they can create the best program possible and provide the greatest service to the children.

*Standard of Excellence: Staff demonstrate warmth and respect for children and actively promote their development and self-esteem.*

Nothing is more critical to program quality than the way staff interact with children. A program can suffer from an inadequate materials budget, cramped outdoor space and other challenges, but still be caring and vibrant if it has staff who enjoy children and have the right mix of personal qualities and skills. Even one staff person who is uninvolved, too controlling, or who views children as the adversary can taint the warm feelings in the program.

All staff should be aware of and apply developmentally appropriate practices in their interactions with children. Staff will be successful in developing great programs if they view themselves as facilitators, rather than directors, of children's activities. Begin by creating a pleasant space, providing lots of choices, and guiding children's activities. If staff reflect thoughtfully about their observations of children and interactions with them, they will begin to fine-tune their practices.

### Quality Indicators

- Staff enjoy children and are interested in watching them, listening to them and interacting with them.
- Staff have age-appropriate expectations of children's abilities and behavior, and understand their individual needs, skills and limitations.
- Staff demonstrate warmth, patience, understanding and fairness with children, and actions show empathy, cooperation and a sense of humor.
- Staff recognize and respond appropriately to a wide range of children's feelings, including anger, happiness and sadness.
- Staff support children and their families during periods of stress and crises.
- Staff value the individual needs and contributions of children and groups, and do not discriminate on grounds of race, ethnicity, sex, income, ability, family background or lifestyle. They encourage all children to respond positively to each child's uniqueness and differences.

- Staff show patience with children who do not speak English fluently, teach them new words and phrases, and include them in activities.
- Staff assist children, without assuming control, by:
  - allowing children to suggest and initiate activities;
  - offering ideas and resources to enrich or expand an activity;
  - permitting children to learn from their own mistakes.
- Staff encourage children's efforts and praise their successes, balancing external rewards with children's needs to find personal value in their activities and accomplishments.
- Staff encourage children to try new activities and master new skills, helping them learn from and cope with disappointment and failure.
- Staff guide children's interactions by:
  - helping children set their own rules and understand those set by others;
  - encouraging and modeling cooperation, honesty and problem solving;
  - giving children a chance to solve their own conflicts and, if needed, helping them to clarify issues, see how their actions affect others, and use compromise and negotiation.

*Standard of Excellence: Staff-child ratios and group sizes are small enough to enable staff to meet the needs of all the children.*

Suggested staff-child ratios are 1:10 for children through age 6, and 1:12 for children over 6. Group sizes will vary according to activity, but will average no more than 25. Research and practice demonstrate that smaller group sizes and lower ratios improve program quality. Some programs will find it hard to afford the suggested ratio, but this ratio enables staff to spend time with individual children and offer them many choices. These are key elements in programs. Without efforts to reach this standard, the quality of the program could be compromised.

### **Quality Indicators**

There are enough staff on hand at all times to:

- Respond to individual needs.
- Engage in activities and conversation with small groups of children, and with children one at a time.
- Supervise children appropriately, knowing where each child is and what they are doing at all times.
- Provide a choice in activities.
- Attend to children with special needs.

## Staff Relationships

Group sizes are small enough that children:

- Have enough space for each activity.
- Don't seem crowded.
- Can get help from an adult when they need it without waiting a long time.
- Don't spend a long time waiting for materials or equipment.
- Have the chance to develop a relationship with at least one staff member.

*Standard of Excellence: Staff support each other, respect and care for each other, working as a team to meet the needs of children.*

Children look to staff as role models. They will learn powerful lessons in human relations as they watch how staff cooperate, communicate, and solve problems with each other. But staff do not come magically equipped to work together as a team. School-age child care programs, just like any work environment, experience interpersonal tensions. A good program will allocate time to build teamwork among the staff and allow them to talk through any problems. To maintain positive relationships, staff should be encouraged to frequently reflect on their interactions with children and each other. To do so, staff needs orientation and ongoing training in the areas below.

### Quality Indicators

- Staff are clear with each other about their roles and responsibilities, but willingly pitch in on other tasks when needed.
- Staff learn and use team-building skills.
- Staff cooperate as a team and work consistently toward program goals.
- Staff are given ample opportunities to communicate frequently about individual children, the health of the program, and their working relationships.
- Staff use negotiation, compromise and conflict resolution to resolve problems with each other.
- Staff respect each other's ideas and opinions, and seek input from colleagues on issues which affect everyone.
- Staff become familiar with each other's skills and experiences, and use these strengths to meet children's needs.

## Staff-Parent Relationships

*Standard of Excellence: Staff form a partnership with parents through frequent communication, goal setting and problem solving, to ensure that each child has a successful experience in the program.*

Parents and guardians of children are always busy, juggling family and work responsibilities. They are pulled in so many directions they may find it hard to focus on their child's before- or after-school experience. It is important for staff to reach out to parents and find time to talk with them and involve them in the program. Some staff avoid this, perhaps because they are more comfortable interacting with children, or because they feel they lack the skills. A good program provides training and support so staff can approach parents in a positive and nonjudgmental way, setting goals and solving problems with them.

### Quality Indicators

- Staff make parents feel welcome at the program with newcomer orientation, warm greetings at drop-off and pickup times, and invitations to attend special events and share time and skills.
- Staff are friendly, positive and professional in communication with parents.
- Staff are respectful to parents and deal comfortably with families of different backgrounds or lifestyles.
- Staff are skillful in dealing with families under stress, providing referrals to other services when appropriate.
- Staff and parents keep each other informed:
  - Staff use notices, bulletin boards and newsletters to inform parents of program happenings.
  - Staff share with parents children's accomplishments and difficulties through conversations, phone calls and formal conferences.
  - Parents share news from home about illness, family changes and alterations in routine.
- The program is responsive to parents' needs regarding schedules, costs, and family crises.
- Staff encourages parents' participation in the program, and in discussions and decisions which impact policy and curriculum, including homework policy and enrichment opportunities.
- Parents have opportunities for input on policy through advisory groups and the board of directors.

## Program-School Relationships

***Standard of Excellence: School and program staff demonstrate respect for the importance of both school and child care in children's development by cooperating to solve problems and enhance the effectiveness of both organizations.***

Schools can contribute in critical ways to program quality by offering a warm welcome to the program, providing it with adequate space, and communicating frequently with program organizers. However, the ongoing success of the school/program relationship is determined by the many daily interactions among school and program personnel, children and parents. Each interaction is important. The way the school receptionist greets the parents, the way program staff respond to an issue raised by school custodians, and the respect that school and program staff show one another will influence the tone of the program.

While all the adults involved share a commitment to the same children, school and child care staff have loyalties to different organizations, which can result in "turf" problems. While a detailed written agreement can prevent problems, efforts must be made to ensure that everyone is comfortable with the integration of the program into the school's life. Official liaisons should be designated, but the principal and the program director have the greatest responsibility to create a strong and enduring collaboration.

### Quality Indicators

- The written agreement includes input from personnel directly impacted by the program. This will ensure their support of the agreement.
- The agreement will outline:
  - all space to be used by the program, including classrooms, gym, play ground and library;
  - furniture, supplies, equipment and storage;
  - telephone and other utilities;
  - opening and closing procedures;
  - cleanup and maintenance;
  - lines of communication.
- A clear set of expectations for children's behavior will be developed, consistent with the needs, goals and philosophy of both school and program.
- Communication will be frequent, and address:
  - how the agreement is working;
  - mutually relevant professional development opportunities;
  - events that can be open to all personnel;
  - information about individual children and the development of consistent goals for those with special needs.
- School and program staff show professional respect for one another and are warm and helpful to the children, parents, and others who are a part of the school and program communities.
- The program director and principal actively work together to prevent problems and resolve those which do arise.

## Activities and Time

1 800 443 3742

**A**ctivities and scheduling reflect the realities of the child's daily experience.

The best school-age child care programs have an approach to activities and scheduling that takes into account the realities of the child's daily life, allowing plenty of time to relax, initiate activities, and move through them at a comfortable pace.

Let's take a look at a day in the life of children whose parents work.

Children may be away from home for 11 hours—a long day, whether they are age 5 or 12. They might rush through a morning routine at home, arrive at before-school care at 7:30 a.m., and go on to school at 8:30 a.m. During six to seven hours at school they spend a lot of time in a room with 20 to 30 other children, where they take instruction, follow directions, produce and achieve. This is a very full "work day," and most children are tired at the end of it. Then they spend three hours in after-school care, go home to connect with their family and eat, do homework or chores, and perhaps take part in sports practice, Scouts, or other activities. We are asking a lot of our children.

A good school-age child care program probably provides the most relaxed part of a child's day. Its focus should be on recreational activities, rather than cognitive development. Children will, of course, continue to learn, but in an informal way, following their own interests and curiosity, and at their own pace.

## Schedule

***Standard of Excellence: The focus of the program is recreational, and the flexible daily schedule reflects the individual needs of the children.***

What did you do at the end of a school day when you were a child? What do you do now at the end of your work day? Chances are, you had then and have now some latitude in what you do and when you do it.

Most children arrive at an after-school program hungry, needing something to eat right away. But others may prefer to wait for a snack. Some children need to find a quiet space, away from the crowd. Others need to let off steam on the playground or in a gym. Some want to be greeted warmly by staff and share their school day with a caring adult. A skilled staff will design the schedule to accommodate the varying needs of each child.

### Quality Indicators

- The schedule is flexible, with room for spontaneity and serendipity, so that new activities can emerge.
- The schedule reflects the need for children to have a balance in activities, which may include: active and quiet time, private time to relax and daydream, large and small motor activity, group and individual activities, and time to talk with friends and staff.

## Choices

- The schedule reflects the developmental needs of children, so that younger ones, with shorter attention spans, can nap and move often between activities, while older children can work for extended periods on projects that interest them.
- The schedule allows children to move at their own pace. Children who finish quickly or lose interest are able to move on to other activities, and children who have a slower pace are not rushed.
- Most activities are child-initiated. Staff-initiated projects are used to spur new interests and skills.
- Children work independently, and look to staff to facilitate and support their activities.

*Standard of Excellence: Children are free to choose activities and friends, and to develop and explore their own interests.*

What is the key to developing a vital and exciting school-age child care program? Simply find out what the children like to do and what they want to learn. Ask them about their interests, observe their activity, listen to their ideas. Then mold program choices around what you have learned.

If some children express an interest in weaving, find a volunteer or specialist who can bring in equipment and give weaving lessons. If the children are fascinated by the Olympics, let them create their own. If you have two children who are wizard at chess, maybe they would like to start a chess club and teach other children. Perhaps another child has become curious about Van Gogh. This could be the impetus for an excursion into art history. Let activities emerge from the children's interests and choices.

### Quality Indicators

- Children can choose from a wide variety of activities that include:
  - active indoor and outdoor sports and games;
  - creativity (drama, dance, music, arts, crafts);
  - clubs, collections and hobbies;
  - relaxation (socializing, listening to music, reading, daydreaming);
  - special events, field trips, and excursions;
  - activities that challenge high-level thinking skills (science experiments, math games, problem solving).
- Many choices are available on a daily basis, supplemented by choices added throughout the year to reflect children's developing interests.
- Children have plenty of opportunity to decide which activities they want to do and with whom they will play.



## Developmental Programming

- When teacher-initiated group activities are planned, children have the option to participate in an alternative activity.
- Staff support children's emerging interests by offering ideas, time and resources for their exploration.
- Staff provide children with non-competitive, team-building activities.
- Children, families and staff devise a reasonable homework policy that incorporates the needs of the children and their families, as well as the availability of staff assistance. Homework is a family responsibility, but the program can provide children with quiet space, time, and homework assistance.

*Standard of Excellence: Program activities reflect the fact that children's needs, interests and abilities vary from individual to individual and change with age.*

Any time we work with young children, we must design activities that are developmentally appropriate. School-age child care programs should always take into account the two dimensions of development set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

*Age appropriateness:* fitting the universal and predictable sequences of growth and change.

*Individual appropriateness:* fitting the individual patterns of timing and growth.

In considering age appropriateness, we think of five- to six-year-olds as still close to their preschool years, where they learn through play, primarily alone or in small groups. Older children are more interested in the fruits of their labors, and their self-worth is directly tied to their achievements. They are looking for chances to learn "real" skills using adult equipment and supplies. Children will often enjoy being in mixed-age groupings, moving between different areas, from dramatic play to club activities. At other times, the oldest children will want to be separate from the younger children, to pursue more opportunities and different roles. Some programs provide a "club space" with expanded choices and responsibilities, or new opportunities in the community.

Programs which do not provide special opportunities for older children often see a dramatic drop-off in enrollment of children age nine and older. Self-care on an everyday basis for children of this age can be a problem, and many programs are working hard to engage these children.

In considering individual appropriateness, staff should take into account each child's interests, learning styles, pace and background.

**Quality Indicators**

- Young children are given many opportunities to learn through play, singly or in small groups.
- Young children are given space and props for dramatic play to explore different roles through such activities as dressing up, housekeeping, puppets, and block-building.
- Young children have access to lots of manipulative equipment for building and creating, such as scissors and paper, paints, crayons, clay, blocks, sand and water.
- All children are provided with materials and opportunities to explore the worlds of science, math and language, with books, games, trips and projects.
- Children, especially older ones, have a chance to explore new experiences and develop skills, including:
  - adult skills like woodworking, pottery, music;
  - community activities like 4-H and Scouts;
  - community service projects, like raising money for the homeless, visits to nursing homes, and environmental projects;
  - career exploration, such as creating a newspaper, interviewing people in different occupations, helping provide care to younger children, or learning about earning money;
  - developing clubs and hobbies;
  - recreational activities such as volleyball, swimming and basketball.
- Older children have time with their friends, including time to focus on their growing self-awareness and appearance.
- The staff provide activities which reflect children's different learning styles and abilities.
- The children are encouraged to use higher-level thinking skills, ask questions, and test out ideas.
- Activities and rules are adapted to meet the levels of all the children, including those with special needs.
- Activities reflect the backgrounds of children in the program and introduce them to other cultures.

## Materials, Supplies, and Equipment

***Standard of Excellence: A high-quality program provides children with a wide variety of materials, supplies and equipment that reflects their interests and needs, and supports their development.***

A well-crafted space richly stocked with materials, supplies and equipment is inviting to children, and allows staff to facilitate rather than direct activities. A visitor to such a space is likely to see children busily engaged in a number of activities, either as individuals or in large and small groups. Some children may be reading, listening to music or resting in the quiet corner; others may be playing board games, working on art projects, building with blocks or dressing up.

Some favorite materials, supplies and equipment will always be available—paint, brushes and paper for the painting corner, Legos, sand and water tables. New materials are brought in regularly to offer fresh choices and introduce new skills. For example, staff might bring in woodworking tools, a weaving loom or hockey sticks.

Budget constraints usually mean that staff become resourceful at collecting supplies and materials. This is an ongoing job, but most staff find it worthwhile to prevent children becoming bored or arguing over limited resources. Parents can help by recycling household items like books and dress-up clothes, buying surprises at yard sales, or offering to sew or build things for the program. Schools and other sponsors can offer to share large and costly equipment like computers, photocopiers, tumbling mats or climbing structures.

### Quality Indicators

- The program has enough materials, supplies and equipment so that:
  - children have a variety of choices for activities;
  - children are busy and don't have to wait for materials, supplies or equipment;
  - children with special needs have specialized or adapted equipment to allow them to participate as fully as possible;
  - children seem involved and excited by what is available, not bored or frustrated.
- Materials, supplies and equipment support the development of:
  - small motor skills (markers, scissors, Legos, puzzles);
  - large motor skills (jump ropes, climbing equipment, balls and racquets, tumbling mats);
  - cognitive skills (reading, strategy games, displays and experiments in science and nature, sand and water tables with measuring and pouring utensils);
  - creativity (music for listening and dancing; musical instruments; props and puppets for dramatic play; crayons, markers, paints, glue, scissors, paper, collage materials, clay; tools and materials for woodworking, sewing, weaving, cooking);

- outdoor play (materials to construct forts, equipment for water and snow play, hopscotch, horseshoes, gardening)

■ Equipment and furniture support activities in the interest areas:

- couches, chairs, bean bag chairs, pillows and carpet squares to provide soft spaces for rest and relaxation;
- easy-to-clean desks, tables, and chairs, and enough storage area for all works-in-progress;
- a stove or microwave for cooking projects and preparing snacks;
- furniture and storage units to divide the room into interest areas, while allowing staff to supervise the children.

■ Materials, supplies and equipment suit the ages of children who use them. For example, furniture is the right size; younger children use blunt scissors, thicker crayons, and smaller woodworking tools. Older children have sharper scissors, regular crayons, adult-sized woodworking tools.

■ Toys, books and posters reflect ethnic, racial, cultural and gender differences within the program.

■ All supplies, materials, and equipment are available to both boys and girls. For example, boys are welcome in the housekeeping corner and dance activities, and girls are welcome in the building corner and playing basketball.

***Standard of Excellence: Sound program administration and decision making on personnel, safety, health and nutrition, fiscal management and legal issues set the framework for a healthy program.***

The program director sets the tone for the program, and must come to the job with many skills, including experience with school-age children, staff supervision, and a talent for management. It is the director's charge to keep track of the hundreds of details that go into the day-to-day operation of a school-age program, while keeping the big picture in view. She or he will work with all who care about the program to set its goals and establish its vision, while finding a balance between the ideal and the realistic. The director is often the hub of the program, and as such, helps keep track of where it stands and where it needs to go.

### **Quality Indicators**

- The program director works closely with a board of directors or parent/community advisory group, keeping them informed and soliciting their input on policy, staff and finances. The director also supports development and carries out program decisions.
- The director ensures strong and cooperative relationships with families through:
  - encouraging parents to become involved in advisory councils, special events, volunteer opportunities and informational parent meetings;
  - frequent communication with parents on how their children are faring in the program;
  - running regular parent-staff conferences.
- The director facilitates frequent communication with the children's school to make sure that information important to the child's development is shared.
- The director nurtures the program's relationship with various segments of the community, including funding sources, child care networks, community resources for children and families, and the media.
- The director ensures that the program conducts continual self-assessment by reviewing past goals and setting new ones, or choosing to participate in a more formal assessment.
- The director ensures a safe environment, and the provision of nutritious snacks and meals, where appropriate.
- The director establishes and implements sound fiscal management procedures and policies.
- The director oversees compliance with legal regulations and requirements.

***Standard of Excellence: Programs seek out qualified staff who demonstrate a commitment to working together, sharing knowledge and skills, to promote children's development.***

The most critical task for a program is to hire and support staff who will make the program the best it can possibly be. Being on a search committee for school-age child care staff may feel like a "Mission Impossible." One job ad might sound like this:

Seeking mature individual who is warm and nurturing with children to be group leader in a school-age child care program. Person will be in charge of a group of 30 5- to 13-year-olds. Needs to be flexible, well-organized and possess a lot of energy. Qualifications: BA or BS in early childhood education, education, social work, recreation or related field, with knowledge of and experience with this age group. Seeking person with skills to share (drama, visual arts, games & sports, etc.) Salary: \$9/hour. No benefits. Hours: 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 3-6 p.m. Monday-Friday, and full-time during summers and school vacation weeks.

This task is challenging enough for any search committee, but candidates should also be screened to find those most likely to complement existing staff skills and personal qualities. It is particularly important that staff composition reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity among the children. Complicating the picture is the fact that school-age child care is a relatively new field with a fledgling sense of its own professionalism, no distinct preservice training, and very few career development opportunities.

These factors, coupled with low wages and often part-time hours, contribute to a high staff turnover rate. According to the National Child Care Staffing Study, the 1988 turnover rate was 41 percent (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips 1990). This lack of continuity in staffing makes it difficult to achieve lasting quality in programs.

There are people in the community who care deeply about children and have training or special interest in recreation-based programs. They may often make better staff members than classroom teachers who have already spent six hours with children and need a break. The challenge is to find these individuals and hire them.

### **Quality Indicators**

- The program director will have experience in working with school-age children, supervising staff, fiscal management and program supervision.
- The director guides and supports staff by outlining current strengths and skills, setting realistic goals, and devising a career development plan that includes training and other professional support.
- The director hires support staff (secretaries, bus drivers, janitors) who enjoy children and work as a team to make the program comfortable and fun.
- The program administrators, staff and sponsors work together to create the best possible compensation package to reduce turnover.

- Staff who supervise children will be at least age 18, undergo a criminal record check, and have either experience with school-age children or formal training in child development, recreation, education, or social work.
- While no one person will possess all the following attributes, each staff member will contribute to a blend of personal qualities, which include:
  - warm and nurturing;
  - sense of humor;
  - patient and compassionate;
  - enthusiastic and spontaneous;
  - consistent and calm, especially in emergencies;
  - understanding, especially of individual and cultural differences;
  - supportive and empowering toward children and parents.
- Staff will work toward acquiring special skills and abilities, including:
  - knowledge of age-appropriate curriculum;
  - skills they can share with children (arts and crafts, games and sports, and other leisure activities);
  - interpersonal skills;
  - organizational and management skills.
- Every staff member has a written job description.
- Staff receive at least 10 hours inservice training each year, developing their knowledge of child development, guiding behavior, working with families, planning and carrying out activities, identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect, and working with children with special needs.
- Individual staff members meet regularly with a supervisor for ongoing support and feedback.
- Staff meet regularly to talk about successes, concerns and issues regarding the children and the program.
- Staff participate in a yearly program evaluation and help set future goals.

## Safety, Health and Nutrition

***Standard of Excellence: A good program protects and enhances the safety, health and nutrition of its children.***

School-age children are an active group, seeking out challenges and taking risks to test the limits of their ever-increasing capabilities. Previous generations may have spent out-of-school hours with freedom to explore neighborhood forests and streams, climb trees, build forts or join neighborhood ball games, checking in with parents only occasionally. Today's school-age child care programs need to respect children's increasing independence and their needs for appropriate challenges and privacy, while protecting their safety and health—and the program's liability.

Basic health and safety standards, like providing first aid training for staff and secure climbing equipment, must be adhered to. Licensing regulations provide general, usually minimum, standards. The board of directors or advisory committee can review licensing standards and adopt additional standards to promote the health and safety of the children. A review of health and safety policies must take into account situational differences between buildings, programs, neighborhoods and communities. For example, it is important for children to have access to outdoor space, but if that space presents hazards, other arrangements should be adopted.

Nutrition is another area to be considered. Most children arrive at the program hungry, having eaten lunch at noon and not expecting dinner until 7 p.m. Two crackers and a glass of juice is not an adequate snack for most children. Programs should decide on the timing, amount and type of snack that will meet their needs.

### Quality Indicators

- Children are supervised at all times.
- Visitors are screened and children are allowed to leave the program only with an authorized adult.
- A staff person trained in first aid and CPR is available at all times.
- A basic first-aid kit is available on-site and for off-site excursions.
- Staff are aware of the special health and educational needs of children and make appropriate accommodations for allergies, diet, and other special needs.
- Staff recognize signs of child abuse and neglect, follow reporting procedures, and follow up constructively with the family.
- Children are not exposed to toxic substances such as lead paint, asbestos or cigarette smoke.
- Medicines and toxic products are stored out of children's reach in locked cabinets.
- Children are not exposed to hazardous situations such as play areas near traffic, exposed radiators, or unprotected windows that could allow them to fall.



## Fiscal Management

- Large indoor and outdoor equipment is bolted down and climbing equipment has cushioning material underneath (mats, sand, or other state-approved cushioning material).
- Staff and children practice basic hygiene (wash hands often, keep sick children in separate space, prepare food in a sanitary area).
- Staff work with children to develop lifelong fitness habits.
- A telephone is within quick reach for emergencies, with numbers for police, fire, ambulance and poison control center clearly posted.
- Posted in prominent places are established emergency procedures and evacuation plans.
- Water is available at all times.
- Snacks and meals are nutritious, with plenty of fruits, vegetables and protein sources, and are limited in fats, salt, and sugar.
- Food is served in a pleasant and relaxed way, and children have a reasonable opportunity to eat when they are hungry.
- An ample amount of food is served to sustain children until their next meal, with supplemental food available for those who are undernourished.

*Standard of Excellence: The budget is planned to adequately support the program's policy and philosophy.*

One of the greatest challenges for any program is to develop a budget that protects and enhances program quality, while at the same time making sure it is accessible and affordable for the families it seeks to serve. Creativity, resourcefulness and smart thinking are required to balance the competing demands of affordable fees, staff salaries and benefits, overhead expenses, and optimum staff-child ratios.

Staff members are the heart of a good program, and salaries generally account for 70-85 percent of expenses. Offering inadequate salaries causes ongoing problems in recruiting and retaining top staff, which in turn causes problems for the children. The National Child Care Staffing Study directly links low salaries with the high annual turnover rate of 41 percent for child care staff (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips 1990). Coupled with the often part-time nature of the work, and no visible career ladder, low salaries can create ongoing personnel problems.

### Quality Indicators

- There is an annual operating budget, with income and expenses reviewed quarterly.

- An accurate bookkeeping system is used, checked by at least two people (staff, parent, treasurer, bookkeeper, accountant).
- Fee structures are affordable and may require support for some low-income families. Support can come through subsidy from government sources (federal child care and development block grants, state social service money, or local government support). Other programs develop sliding fee scales or scholarships made possible by parent contribution or private support.
- Programs moderate their parent fees and vary their source of income through:
  - reimbursement of food costs for eligible families through USDA's child care food program;
  - public support from local funds such as youth and family services, recreation departments, community development block grants, state and federal funds;
  - private support from foundations, civic and charitable organizations, and corporations;
  - traditional fund-raising conducted by staff, parents and children.
- Budgets include adequate amounts for staff compensation and support, including:
  - salaries, FICA, unemployment insurance;
  - benefits (at a minimum—health insurance, paid sick days and holidays, paid planning time).
- Programs reduce expenditures with direct or in-kind support for:
  - rent;
  - utilities and maintenance;
  - equipment and supplies;
  - transportation;
  - legal costs;
  - marketing.

## Legal Issues

***Standard of Excellence: Program procedures and policies protect children and staff through a methodical and well informed approach to authorization, licensing, risk management and protection from liability.***

Schools already have a great deal of experience in risk reduction and liability protection. That experience, which comes with serving children, can serve as a foundation for exploring other legal issues specific to school-age child care.

Programs run by or housed in schools ensure that state or local statutes authorize the program's existence. If statutes do not exist or are vague, work should be done to obtain, create, or rewrite them. In addition, a school board resolution should be obtained which makes involvement legitimate and establishes a clear relationship between the school and the organization running the program. The resolution should include

details on what space can be used, a policy for joint occupancy or leasing arrangement, when the program can operate, and a clause on nondiscrimination in hiring and enrollment.

While many school-based programs are exempt from licensing, a school-run program may choose to become licensed or use licensing requirements as a guide to ensuring minimum standards. Schools in a partnership agreement with a vendor may want to incorporate standards into the program contract to be sure the school has a voice in the level of quality that is maintained. These schools may also want to be assured that the vendor, and not the school, will be responsible for liability. Other schools may choose to include the program in their existing liability insurance.

### Quality Indicators

- Programs meet all licensing, building and fire codes, and zoning requirements.
- Potential liability issues are reviewed with risk management or legal experts, and risk management procedures are adopted to reduce the normal risks of running a program.
- Programs operate with adequate liability insurance.
- Schools in a partnership arrangement ensure that the vendor, not the school, is responsible in case of accidents or negligence.
- Programs administered by someone other than the school make the decisions about:
  - incorporation, so that the corporation and people who work in it are legally separated from personal responsibility or liability;
  - nonprofit or for-profit status;
  - tax-exempt status.
- Staff maintain appropriate records (children's addresses, telephone numbers and emergency contacts; attendance; health of staff and children; special health and educational needs; injuries and accidents; reports on child abuse and neglect).
- Staff regularly review safety and health practices to make certain they are "reasonably prudent" in assuring the safety of each child.
- In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, programs open their doors to children with special needs, unless it creates an undue burden on the program.

## Appendix A

### Applying the Standards: A Checklist

This checklist has been designed to help you assess program quality. Complete the checklist by observing programs and by questioning staff to identify the extent to which each of the quality indicators in *Standards for Quality School-Age Child Care* is evident. Decide if a quality indicator is *Always Evident*, *Usually Evident*, *Seldom Evident*, or *Not Evident*. Specific definitions for these terms should be determined through consensus among the people using the checklist.

There is no substitute for seeing your program in action. Taking the time to observe the program and complete this checklist will help you identify the areas in which the program is strong and which need improvement. Your record will be greatly enriched if you use the comments section to note anecdotes and examples describing what you see.

This checklist can be used to guide program improvement. Indicators that are *Always Evident* or *Usually Evident* may indicate areas of strength, while *Seldom Evident* or *Not Evident* may indicate areas that need attention. Once you agree on which areas need attention, you can set goals and decide what strategies will help you reach your goal. Then you can decide which areas are priorities and what work is necessary to reach your goals.

Remember that when you are talking about program improvement, you are talking about change. Change will be most successful when you involve in the decisions the people who will be affected by the change.

## The Role of the School

*The school plays a pivotal role in the quality of school-based programs when it provides:*

- a warm welcome to the program
- ongoing communication and support
- adequate indoor and outdoor space and storage
- a commitment to high standards.

**Standard:** The school will formalize its relationship with the program to ensure sound communication and sort out policies, roles and responsibilities to benefit the children served.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff help the program staff, children and parents feel they're an important part of the school family by greeting them warmly, accommodating reasonable requests, and taking concerns or problems through proper channels</li> <li>• The school and program agree in writing on rules, roles and responsibilities regarding space, maintenance schedules, finances and accountability.</li> <li>• School and program personnel affected by the agreement are asked for input before it is made final, to ensure that they can both accept and comply with the agreements.</li> <li>• At least once a year, the agreement and its guidelines are reviewed to assess their impact on both program and school.</li> <li>• The school and program each designate liaisons who meet periodically to review administrative issues and share pertinent information about the children and the program.</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## Role of the School: School-based Programs

*Schools can make a critical difference in balancing accessibility, affordability and quality. The in-kind and direct support that schools offer, such as donated space, utilities, maintenance or direct contributions, can make a world of difference. These contributions may make it possible for programs to pay higher salaries, retain experienced staff, and provide financial assistance for low-income families.*

**Standard:** School communities explore how their policies can best support a high quality program for all children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools provide maximum possible support to the program budget through in-kind and direct contributions, including no- or low-cost charges for space, utilities, maintenance, administration, and contributions of cash, materials and equipment.</li> <li>• Schools work with the program to identify sources to contribute to sliding fee scales, subsidies and scholarships, so all families can afford to use the program.</li> <li>• Schools work with the program so children with special needs can participate.</li> <li>• Schools use their resources and influence to ensure the program is of high quality.</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS

## Role of the School: Indoor Space

*It is an art to craft a well designed space that takes into account the program's philosophy, available space, and the way in which room arrangements will affect the children's activities and interactions.*

**Standard: Indoor space is comfortable, adequate in size, clean and well organized.**

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor space is adequate, with at least 35 square feet per child.</li> <li>• The area is safe, clean, and in good repair.</li> <li>• The space is separated for different types of activities:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- quiet areas for rest, privacy, reading or homework;</li> <li>- interest areas for board games, creative arts, dramatic play, cooking and eating, science and nature, blocks and building materials;</li> <li>- open areas for large motor activity or to gather in groups.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The area is cozy, warm and inviting, using carpets, couches, pillows and bean bag chairs to create soft spaces.</li> <li>• Storage is adequate to keep the space neat and well organized.</li> <li>• The space is organized so that children moving from one space to another don't disrupt ongoing activities.</li> <li>• Supplies and materials are accessible to children.</li> <li>• Children have a place to store their personal belongings and ongoing projects.</li> <li>• Moveable storage cabinets and stacked containers aid in shared space situations.</li> <li>• Children's projects are prominently displayed.</li> <li>• Water is available for drinking, art and science projects, cooking and cleanup.</li> <li>• Children's special needs are taken into account (e.g., wheelchair ramps and handicapped-accessible toilets).</li> <li>• Ventilation and temperature are comfortable.</li> <li>• Noise level is acceptable for the activity taking place in any given area.</li> </ul>				

COMMENTS

## Role of the School: Outdoor Space

*Outdoor space is a critical resource when working with school-age children who need room to "blow off steam," run, jump and make noise.*

**Standard:** Outdoor space is adequate in size and has enough equipment and activity choices to offer a variety of safe challenges for children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor space is adequate, with at least 75 square feet per child.</li> <li>• The space is clean, safe and protected from traffic, unwanted visitors and environmental hazards.</li> <li>• Separate areas exist for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- active games, sports and running;</li> <li>- quiet play;</li> <li>- climbing and swinging;</li> <li>- extra choices, which might include gardening, fort building and other self-initiated activities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There is enough equipment that children don't need to crowd or argue over it.</li> <li>• The equipment is age-appropriate to offer safe challenges for the children.</li> <li>• The area and equipment are adapted to children with special needs (for example, pull tunnels for children who can't use their legs, sandboxes high enough for children in wheelchairs, rigid swing seats and straps to hold children who need support).</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS



**Role of the School: Community-based Programs**

*Schools play an important role in supporting families' ability to choose the non-school care arrangement they prefer, through transportation policy and sharing information about existing programs.*

**Standard: Schools support families' free choice of care arrangements by making it possible for children to get to care safely, and by setting up communication with community-based programs to share important information about children.**

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools support a broad number of care options for families, and when possible, make information available to organizations that can help parents find suitable care.</li> <li>• Schools are aware of the major care providers in their community and reach out to them to establish communication about children. The school can explore the program's need for support, such as access to guidance personnel and space for special events like plays, or for everyday use of gyms or playground.</li> <li>• Schools review the impact that current transportation policies have on families' ability to connect with care arrangements.</li> <li>• Schools take all feasible steps to provide safe and free or low-cost transportation for before-school and after-school care. They maintain high standards in vehicle and driver safety and in selecting safe sites for dropoff and pickup.</li> <li>• Schools work cooperatively with programs that provide their own transportation to make sure drop-off and pickup run smoothly and safely.</li> </ul>				

**COMMENTS**

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Human Relationships: Staff-Child Relationships

*Positive staff interactions with children, parents and each other make the critical difference between mediocre and high-quality programs.*

**Standard: Staff demonstrate warmth and respect for children and actively promote their development and self-esteem.**

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff enjoy children and are interested in watching them, listening to them and interacting with them.</li> <li>• Staff have age-appropriate expectations of children's abilities and behavior, and understand their individual needs, skills and limitations.</li> <li>• Staff demonstrate warmth, patience, understanding and fairness with children, and actions show empathy, cooperation and a sense of humor.</li> <li>• Staff recognize and respond appropriately to a wide range of children's feelings, including anger, happiness and sadness.</li> <li>• Staff support children and their families during periods of stress and crises.</li> <li>• Staff value the individual needs and contributions of children and groups, and do not discriminate on grounds of race, ethnicity, sex, income, ability, family background or lifestyle. They encourage all children to respond positively to each child's uniqueness and differences.</li> <li>• Staff show patience with children who do not speak English fluently, teach them new words and phrases, and include them in activities.</li> <li>• Staff assist children, without assuming control, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allowing children to suggest and initiate activities;</li> <li>- offering ideas and resources to enrich or expand an activity;</li> <li>- permitting children to learn from their own mistakes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Staff encourage children's efforts and praise their successes, balancing external rewards with children's need to find personal value in their activities and accomplishments.</li> </ul>				

QUALITY INDICATORS (cont'd.)	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff encourage children to try new activities and master new skills, helping them learn from and cope with disappointment and failure.</li><li>• Staff guide children's interactions by:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- helping children set their own rules and understand those set by others;</li><li>- encouraging and modeling cooperation, honesty and problem solving;</li><li>- giving children a chance to solve their own conflicts and, if needed, helping them to clarify issues, see how their actions affect others, and use compromise and negotiation.</li></ul></li></ul>				

**COMMENTS**

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Human Relationships: Staff-Child Ratio and Group Sizes

*Research and practice demonstrate that smaller group sizes and lower ratios improve program quality. Suggested staff-child ratios are 1:10 for children through age 6, and 1:12 for children over 6. Group sizes will vary according to activity, but will average 25. Some programs will find it hard to afford the suggested ratio, but this ratio enables staff to spend time with individual children and offer them lots of choices.*

**Standard:** Staff-child ratios and group sizes are small enough to enable staff to meet the needs of all the children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<p><i>There are enough staff on hand at all times to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to individual needs.</li> <li>• Engage in activities and conversation with small groups of children, and with children one at a time.</li> <li>• Supervise children appropriately, knowing where each child is and what they are doing at all times.</li> <li>• Provide a choice in activities.</li> <li>• Attend to children with special needs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Group sizes are small enough that children:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have enough space for each activity.</li> <li>• Don't seem crowded.</li> <li>• Can get help from an adult when they need it without waiting a long time.</li> <li>• Don't spend a long time waiting for materials or equipment.</li> <li>• Have the chance to develop a relationship with at least one staff member.</li> </ul>				

### COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## Human Relationships: Staff Relationships

*Children look to staff as role models. They will learn powerful lessons in human relations as they watch how staff cooperate, communicate, and solve problems with each other.*

**Standard:** Staff support each other, respect and care for each other, working as a team to meet the needs of children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff are clear with each other about their roles and responsibilities, but willingly pitch in on other tasks when needed.</li> <li>• Staff learn and use team-building skills.</li> <li>• Staff cooperate as a team and work consistently toward program goals.</li> <li>• Staff are given ample opportunities to communicate frequently about individual children, the health of the program, and their working relationships.</li> <li>• Staff use negotiation, compromise and conflict resolution to resolve problems with each other.</li> <li>• Staff respect each other's ideas and opinions, and seek input from colleagues on issues which affect everyone.</li> <li>• Staff become familiar with each other's skills and experiences, and use these strengths to meet children's needs.</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## Human Relationships: Staff-Parent Relationships

*Parents and guardians of children are always busy, juggling family and work responsibilities. It is important for staff to reach out to parents and find time to talk with them and involve them in the program.*

**Standard:** Staff form a partnership with parents through frequent communication, goal setting and problem solving, to ensure that each child has a successful experience in the program.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff make parents feel welcome at the program with newcomer orientation, warm greetings at drop-off and pickup, and invitations to attend special events and share time and skills.</li> <li>• Staff are friendly, positive and professional in communication with parents.</li> <li>• Staff are respectful to parents and deal comfortably with families of different backgrounds or lifestyles.</li> <li>• Staff are skillful in dealing with families under stress, providing referrals to other services when appropriate.</li> <li>• Staff and parents keep each other informed:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff use notices, bulletin boards and newsletters to inform parents of program happenings.</li> <li>- Staff share with parents children's accomplishments and difficulties through conversations, phone calls and formal conferences.</li> <li>- Parents share news from home about illness, family changes and alterations in routine.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The program is responsive to parents' needs regarding schedules, costs, and family crises.</li> <li>• Staff encourages parents' participation in the program, and in discussions and decisions which impact policy and curriculum, including homework policy and enrichment opportunities.</li> <li>• Parents have opportunities for input on policy through advisory groups and the board of directors.</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Human Relationships: Program-School Relationships

*The ongoing success of the relationship between school and program is determined by the many daily interactions among school personnel, program staff, children and parents.*

**Standard:** School and program staff demonstrate respect for the importance of both school and child care in children's development by cooperating to solve problems and enhance the effectiveness of both organizations.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The written agreement includes input from personnel directly impacted by the program. This will ensure their support of the agreement.</li> <li>• The agreement will outline: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all space to be used by the program, including classrooms, gym, playground and library;</li> <li>- furniture, supplies, equipment and storage;</li> <li>- telephone and other utilities;</li> <li>- opening and closing procedures;</li> <li>- cleanup and maintenance;</li> <li>- lines of communication.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A clear set of expectations for children's behavior will be developed, consistent with the needs, goals and philosophy of both school and program.</li> <li>• Communication will be frequent and will address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how the agreement is working;</li> <li>- mutually relevant professional development opportunities;</li> <li>- events that can be open to all personnel;</li> <li>- information about individual children and the development of consistent goals for those with special needs.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• School and program staff show professional respect for one another and are warm and helpful to the children, parents, and others who are a part of the school and program communities.</li> <li>• The program director and principal actively work together to prevent problems and resolve those which do arise.</li> </ul>				

COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Activities and Time: Schedule

*A good school-age child care program probably provides the most relaxed part of a child's day. Its focus should be on recreational activities, rather than cognitive development. Children will, of course, continue to learn, but in an informal way, following their own interests and curiosity, and moving at their own pace.*

**Standard:** The focus of the program is recreational, and the flexible daily schedule reflects the individual needs of the children.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The schedule is flexible, with room for spontaneity and serendipity, so that new activities can emerge.</li> <li>• The schedule reflects the need for children to have a balance in activities, which may include: active and quiet time, private time to relax and daydream, large and small motor activity, group and individual activities, and time to talk with friends and staff.</li> <li>• The schedule reflects the developmental needs of children, so that younger ones, with shorter attention spans, can nap and move often between activities, while older children can work for extended periods on projects that interest them.</li> <li>• The schedule allows children to move at their own pace. Children who finish quickly or lose interest are able to move on to other activities, and children who have a slower pace are not rushed.</li> <li>• Most activities are child-initiated. Staff-initiated projects are used to spur new interests and skills.</li> <li>• Children work independently, and look to staff to facilitate and support their activities.</li> </ul>				

### COMMENTS



## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Activities and Time: Choices

*What is the key to developing a vital and exciting school-age child care program? Simply find out what the children like to do and what they want to learn. Ask them about their interests, observe their activity, listen to their ideas. Then mold program choices around what you have learned.*

**Standard:** Children are free to choose activities and friends and to develop and explore their own interests.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children can choose from a wide variety of activities that include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- active indoor and outdoor sports and games;</li> <li>- creativity (drama, dance, music, arts, crafts);</li> <li>- clubs, collections and hobbies;</li> <li>- relaxation (socializing, listening to music, reading, daydreaming);</li> <li>- special events, field trips, and excursions;</li> <li>- activities that challenge high-level thinking skills (science experiments, math games, problem solving).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Many choices are available on a daily basis, supplemented by choices added throughout the year to reflect children's developing interests.</li> <li>• Children have plenty of opportunity to decide which activities they want to do and with whom they will play.</li> <li>• When teacher-initiated group activities are planned, children have the option to participate in an alternative activity.</li> <li>• Staff support children's emerging interests by offering ideas, time and resources for their exploration.</li> <li>• Staff provide children with non-competitive, team-building activities.</li> <li>• Children, families and staff devise a reasonable homework policy that incorporates the needs of the children and their families, as well as the availability of staff assistance. Homework is a family responsibility, but the program can provide children with quiet space, time, and homework assistance.</li> </ul>				

### COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## Activities and Time: Developmental Programming

*Program activities will be appropriate for the ages and the individuals involved in the program.*

**Standard:** Program activities reflect the fact that children's needs, interests and abilities vary from individual to individual and change with age.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young children are given many opportunities to learn through play, singly or in small groups.</li> <li>• Young children are given space and props for dramatic play to explore different roles through such activities as dressing up, housekeeping, puppets, and block-building.</li> <li>• Young children have access to lots of manipulative equipment for building and creating, such as scissors and paper, paints, crayons, clay, blocks, sand and water.</li> <li>• All children are provided with materials and opportunities to explore the worlds of science, math and language, with books, games, trips and projects.</li> <li>• Children, especially older ones, have a chance to explore new experiences and develop skills, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adult skills like woodworking, pottery, music;</li> <li>- community activities such as 4-H and Scouts;</li> <li>- community service projects, like raising money for the homeless, visits to nursing homes, and environmental projects;</li> <li>- career exploration, such as creating a newspaper, interviewing people in different occupations, helping provide care to younger children, or learning about earning money;</li> <li>- developing clubs and hobbies;</li> <li>- recreational activities such as volleyball, swimming and basketball.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Older children have time with their friends, including time to focus on their growing self-awareness and appearance.</li> <li>• The staff provide activities which reflect children's different learning styles and abilities.</li> <li>• The children are encouraged to use higher-level thinking skills, ask questions, and test out ideas.</li> <li>• Activities and rules are adapted to meet the levels of all the children, including those with special needs.</li> <li>• Activities reflect the backgrounds of children in the program and introduce them to other cultures.</li> </ul>	50			

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Activities and Time: Materials, Supplies, and Equipment

*A well crafted space richly stocked with materials, supplies and equipment is inviting to children, and allows staff to facilitate rather than direct activities.*

**Standard: A high-quality program provides children with a wide variety of materials, supplies and equipment that reflects their interests and needs, and supports their development.**

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program has enough materials, supplies and equipment so that:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- children have a variety of choices for activities;</li> <li>- children are busy and don't have to wait for materials, supplies or equipment;</li> <li>- children with special needs have specialized or adapted equipment to allow them to participate as fully as possible;</li> <li>- children seem involved and excited by what is available, not bored or frustrated.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Materials, supplies and equipment support the development of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- small motor skills (markers, scissors, Legos, puzzles);</li> <li>- large motor skills (jump ropes, climbing equipment, balls and racquets, tumbling mats);</li> <li>- cognitive skills (reading, strategy games, displays and experiments in science and nature, sand and water tables);</li> <li>- creativity (music for listening and dancing; musical instruments; props and puppets for dramatic play; crayons, markers, paints, glue, scissors, paper, collage materials, clay; tools and materials for woodworking, sewing, weaving, cooking);</li> <li>- outdoor play (materials to construct forts, equipment for water and snow play, hopscotch, horseshoes, gardening).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Equipment and furniture support activities in the interest areas:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- couches, chairs, bean bag chairs, pillows and carpet squares to provide soft spaces for rest and relaxation;</li> <li>- easy-to-clean desks, tables, and chairs, and enough storage for all works-in-progress;</li> <li>- a stove or microwave for cooking projects and preparing snacks;</li> <li>- furniture and storage units to divide the room into interest areas, while allowing staff to supervise the children.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Materials, supplies and equipment suit the ages of children. Furniture is the right size; younger children use blunt scissors, thicker crayons.</li> <li>• Toys, books and posters reflect ethnic, racial, cultural and gender differences within the program.</li> <li>• All supplies, materials, and equipment are available to both boys and girls. For example, boys are welcome in the housekeeping corner and dance activities, and girls are welcome in the building corner and playing basketball.</li> </ul>				

Administration

*The program director sets the tone for the program, and must come to the job with many skills, including experience with school-age children, staff supervision, and a talent for management. It is the director's charge to keep track of the hundreds of details that go into the day-to-day operation of a school-age program, while keeping the big picture in view.*

**Standard:** Sound program administration and decision making on personnel, safety, health and nutrition, fiscal management and legal issues set the framework for a healthy program.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program director works closely with a board of directors or parent/community advisory group, keeping them informed and soliciting their input on policy, staff and finances. The director also supports development and carries out program decisions.</li> <li>• The director ensures strong and cooperative relationships with families through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encouraging parents to become involved in parent advisory councils, special events, volunteer opportunities and informational parent meetings;</li> <li>- frequent communication with parents on how their children are faring in the program;</li> <li>- running regular parent-staff conferences.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The director facilitates frequent communication with the children's school to make sure that information important to the child's development is shared.</li> <li>• The director nurtures the program's relationship with various segments of the community, including funding sources, child care networks, community resources for children and families, and the media.</li> <li>• The director ensures that the program conducts continual self-assessment by reviewing past goals and setting new ones, or choosing to participate in a more formal assessment.</li> <li>• The director ensures a safe environment, and the provision of nutritious snacks and meals, where appropriate.</li> <li>• The director establishes and implements sound fiscal management procedures and policies.</li> <li>• The director oversees compliance with legal regulations and requirements.</li> </ul>				

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

### Administration: Personnel

*One of the biggest challenges in school-age child care is to hire and train staff with the best blend of personnel qualities and skills.*

**Standard:** Programs seek out qualified staff who demonstrate a commitment to working together, sharing knowledge and skills, to promote children's development.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program director will have experience in working with school-age children, supervising staff, fiscal management and program supervision.</li> <li>• The director guides and supports staff by outlining current strengths and skills, setting realistic goals, and devising a career development plan that includes training and other professional support.</li> <li>• The director hires support staff (secretaries, bus drivers and janitors) who enjoy children and work as a team to make the program comfortable and fun.</li> <li>• The program administrators, staff and sponsors work together to create the best possible compensation package to reduce turnover.</li> <li>• Staff who supervise children will be at least age 18, undergo a criminal record check, and have either experience with school-age children, or formal training in child development, recreation, education, or social work.</li> <li>• While no one person will possess all the following attributes, each staff member will contribute to a blend of personal qualities, which include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- warm and nurturing;</li> <li>- sense of humor;</li> <li>- patient and compassionate;</li> <li>- enthusiastic and spontaneous;</li> <li>- consistent and calm, especially in emergencies;</li> <li>- understanding, especially of individual and cultural differences;</li> <li>- supportive and empowering toward children and parents.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Staff will work toward acquiring special skills and abilities, including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge of age-appropriate curriculum;</li> <li>- skills they can share with children (arts and crafts, games and sports, and other leisure activities);</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				

QUALITY INDICATORS (cont'd.)	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- interpersonal skills;</li><li>- organizational and management skills.</li><li>• Every staff member has a written job description.</li><li>• Staff receive at least 10 hours of inservice training each year, developing their knowledge of child development, guiding behavior, working with families, planning and carrying out activities, identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect, and working with children with special needs.</li><li>• Individual staff members meet regularly with a supervisor for ongoing support and feedback.</li><li>• Staff meet regularly to talk about successes, concerns and issues regarding the children and the program.</li><li>• Staff participate in yearly program evaluation and help set future goals.</li></ul>				

## COMMENTS

## STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

Administration: Safety, Health and Nutrition

*Today's school-age child care programs need to respect children's increasing independence and their needs for appropriate challenges and privacy, while protecting their safety and health.*

**Standard: A good program protects and enhances the safety, health and nutrition of its children.**

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are supervised at all times.</li> <li>• Visitors are screened and children are allowed to leave the program only with an authorized adult.</li> <li>• A staff person trained in first aid and CPR is available at all times.</li> <li>• A basic first-aid kit is available on-site and for off-site excursions.</li> <li>• Staff are aware of the special health and educational needs of children and make appropriate accommodations for allergies, diet and other special needs.</li> <li>• Staff recognize signs of child abuse and neglect, follow reporting procedures and follow up constructively with the family.</li> <li>• Children are not exposed to toxic substances such as lead paint, asbestos or cigarette smoke.</li> <li>• Medicines and toxic products are stored out of children's reach in locked cabinets.</li> <li>• Children are not exposed to hazardous situations such as play areas near traffic, exposed radiators, or unprotected windows.</li> <li>• Large indoor and outdoor equipment is bolted down and climbing equipment has cushioning material underneath (mats, sand or other state-approved cushioning material).</li> <li>• Staff and children practice basic hygiene (wash hands often, keep sick children in separate space, prepare food in a sanitary area).</li> <li>• Staff work with children to develop lifelong fitness habits.</li> <li>• A telephone is within quick reach for emergencies, with numbers for police, fire, ambulance and poison control center clearly posted.</li> <li>• Posted in prominent places are established emergency procedures and evacuation plans.</li> <li>• Water is available at all times.</li> <li>• Snacks and meals are nutritious, with plenty of fruits, vegetables and protein sources, and are limited in fats, salt, and sugar.</li> <li>• Food is served in a pleasant and relaxed way, and children have a reasonable opportunity to eat when they are hungry.</li> <li>• An ample amount of food is served to sustain children until their next meal, with supplemental food available for those who are undernourished.</li> </ul>				

Administration: Fiscal Management

*Creativity, resourcefulness and smart thinking are required to balance the competing demands of affordable fees, staff salaries and benefits, overhead expenses, and optimum staff-child ratios.*

Standard: The budget is planned to adequately support the program's policy and philosophy.

QUALITY INDICATORS	Always Evident	Usually Evident	Seldom Evident	Not Evident
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an annual operating budget, with income and expenses reviewed quarterly.</li> <li>• An accurate bookkeeping system is used, checked by at least two people (staff, parent, treasurer, bookkeeper, accountant).</li> <li>• Fee structures are affordable and may require support for some low-income families. Support can come through subsidy from government sources (federal child care and development block grants, state social service money, or local government support). Other programs develop sliding fee scales or scholarships made possible by parent contribution or private support.</li> <li>• Programs moderate their parent fees and vary their source of income by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reimbursement of food costs for eligible families through USDA's child care food program;</li> <li>- public support from local funds such as youth and family services, recreation departments, community development block grants, state and federal funds;</li> <li>- private support from foundations, civic and charitable organizations, and corporations;</li> <li>- traditional fund-raising conducted by staff, parents and children.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Budgets include adequate amounts for staff compensation and support, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- salaries, FICA, unemployment insurance;</li> <li>- benefits (at a minimum—health insurance, paid sick days and holidays, paid planning time).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Programs reduce expenditures with direct or in-kind support for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rent;</li> <li>- utilities and maintenance;</li> <li>- equipment and supplies;</li> <li>- transportation;</li> <li>- legal costs;</li> <li>- marketing.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				



# STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## Administration: Legal Issues

*Programs must explore all legal issues to ensure authorization for the program and provide protection for the children and staff involved with the program.*

**Standard:** Program procedures and policies protect children and staff through a methodical and well informed approach to authorization, licensing, risk management and protection from liability.

QUALITY INDICATORS	<i>Always Evident</i>	<i>Usually Evident</i>	<i>Seldom Evident</i>	<i>Not Evident</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs meet all licensing, building and fire codes, and zoning requirements.</li> <li>• Potential liability issues are reviewed with risk management or legal experts, and risk management procedures are adopted to reduce the normal risks of running a program.</li> <li>• Programs operate with adequate liability insurance.</li> <li>• Schools in a partnership arrangement ensure that the vendor, not the school, is responsible in case of accidents or negligence.</li> <li>• Programs administered by someone other than the school make the decisions about:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- incorporation, so that the corporation and people who work in it are legally separated from personal responsibility or liability;</li> <li>- nonprofit or for-profit status;</li> <li>- tax-exempt status.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Staff maintain appropriate records (children's addresses, telephone numbers and emergency contacts; attendance; health of staff and children; special health and educational needs; injuries and accidents; reports on child abuse and neglect).</li> <li>• Staff regularly review safety and health practices to make certain they are "reasonably prudent" in assuring the safety of each child.</li> <li>• In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, programs open their doors to children with special needs, unless it creates an undue burden on the program.</li> </ul>				

## COMMENTS

## Appendix B: Further Reading

### Program Start-up and Implementation

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# Acknowledgements

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## Related Organizations

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### Association for Childhood Education International

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Membership includes 6 issues per year of the journal, which is concerned with children from infancy through adolescence.

### The Boys' and Girls' Club of America National Headquarters

771 1st Avenue

New York, NY 10017

(212) 351-5900

### Campfire Boys and Girls National Headquarters

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Kansas City, MO 64112

(816) 756-1950

### Central Region SACC Project

(formerly Pennsylvania SACC Project)

116 South Allegheny Street, Suite 314

Bellefonte, PA 16823

(814) 353-6110; (800) 327-0111

### Child Care Action Campaign

330 Seventh Avenue, 18th Floor

New York, NY 10001

(212) 239-0138

Dedicated to increasing the availability of quality, affordable school-age child care programs. Tracks implementation of child care provisions of the Family Support Act in 16 states. Newsletter, *Child Care Action News*.

### Child Care Employee Project

6536 Telegraph Avenue, Suite A-201

Oakland, CA 94609

(415) 653-9889

### *Child Care Information Exchange*

P. O. Box 2890

Redmond, WA 98073

(206) 883-9394

6 issues/year-\$35. Geared for directors, discusses issues such as staff development, staff-parent interaction, programming, financial management.

### Children's Defense Fund (CDF)

122 C Street N.W.

Washington, DC 20001

(202) 628-8787

A national advocacy group that lobbies for children, particularly those who are poor, at risk, or with special needs. Journal, *Opportunities for Prevention: Building After-School and Summer Programs for Young Adolescents*. 6 issues/year-\$23.95.



*Daycare U.S.A.*

United Communications Group  
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Rockville, MD 20852

(301) 816-8950, Ext.223

Published biweekly. Information about daycare; concentrates on federal funding opportunities, legislation, and regulation of daycare. \$199/year.

## 4-H Clubs

National 4-H Council  
7100 Connecticut Ave.  
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(301) 961-2800

## Girls Inc.

National Headquarters  
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New York, NY 10016  
(212) 689-3700

## League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF)

1730 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 429-1965

Promotes the development of model community-based, affordable, quality school-age child care programs, particularly for low-income families.

## National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 232-8777

Committed to improving the quality of services for children from birth through age 8. Professional development for early childhood educators through publications on child care issues, an annual conference, action group grants, sharing public policy information, and guidelines for voluntary accreditation.

## National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA)

2116 Campus Drive S.E.  
Rochester, MN 55904  
(507) 287-2220

Publishes a directory of child care resource and referral agencies throughout the U.S. Magazine, *CCRR Issues (Child Care Resource and Referral Issues)*.

## National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

1615 Duke Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483  
(703) 684-3345

Serves 26,000+ principals in elementary and middle schools. Publications include *Principal* magazine, newsletters, and books of recommended *Standards*.

**National School-Age Child Care Alliance (NSACCA)**

c/o Tracey Ballas  
1742 Norwood Boulevard  
Zanesville, OH 43701

For membership information: c/o California School-Age Consortium, NSACCA  
Membership Dept., 111 New Montgomery St., San Francisco, CA 94105.  
Organization of school-age child care professionals. Sponsors an annual conference, develops and provides technical assistance, and promotes the development of state and local coalitions.

**Project HOMESAFE**

American Home Economics Association  
1555 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(800) 252-SAFE

Promotes community-based solutions to the latchkey issue. Bibliographies on school-age child care programs.

*Report on School-Age Child Care*  
(formerly *School-Age Child Care Report*)

951 Pershing Drive  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
(301) 587-6300

A monthly update on school-age and pre-kindergarten child care programs. Lists conferences and events of interest to child care providers.

**School-Age Child Care Project**

Center for Research on Women  
Wellesley College  
Wellesley, MA 02181  
(617) 283-2547

A center for information, research and technical assistance on all aspects of school-age child care. Offers training workshops and institutes for those interested in starting or improving school-age child care programs.

*School-Age Notes*

P. O. Box 120674  
Nashville, TN 37212  
(615) 292-4957

Newsletter for school-age child care workers and administrators; covers issues related to school-age child care--developmental needs, staff training, programming, and activities.

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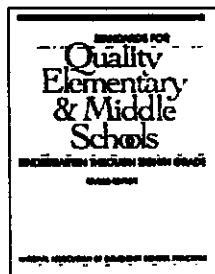
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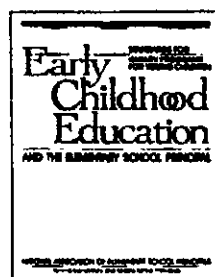
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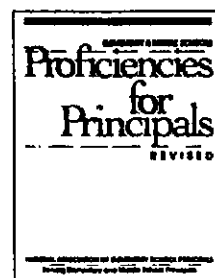
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*Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools: Kindergarten through Eighth Grade (Revised)* (1990). One of NAESP's most popular publications, this edition combines the findings of current research with the practical experience of working principals to provide valuable guidance for constructive change in schools. Addresses class size, assistant principalship, and more.



*Early Childhood Education and the Elementary School Principal: Standards for Quality Programs for Young Children* (1990). This widely acclaimed checklist of 28 standards for early childhood programs covers all the essential elements for excellence in early childhood education. Contains suggestions for classroom settings, curriculum activities and personnel qualifications, and describes the roles of principal, staff and parents.



*Proficiencies for Principals: Elementary and Middle Schools (Revised)* (1991). The essential guide for the serious professional, *Proficiencies* has been adopted by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as the national standard for professional preparation courses. Presents the key elements for success as an elementary or middle school principal.

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